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DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION¹

IN CHARGE OF
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THE ELIMINATION OF NON-ESSENTIALS IN THE TRAINING OF NURSES

The subject upon which I have been asked to speak is primarily a practical one. We may theorize upon the functions to be eliminated, but only through application can we judge to what extent we shall eliminate unnecessary procedure.

There can be no question but that many procedures taught in our schools of nursing are primarily important for the establishment of habits of order and fitness of things, which should be repeated sufficiently often to become firmly imbedded in the minds of the students as a necessity in the maintenance of proper standards and ideals, but which can be dropped as the course advances, in order to give place to the more scientific instruction, leaving them to be carried on by a person who aspires to no greater task.

I am referring to the matters concerned in the sweeping and dusting of patients' rooms, making of empty beds, care of lavatories, work-rooms, general ward dusting, carrying of trays to patients, washing of wash-cloths, removal of stains from linen, washing and ironing of creton covers for chairs in private rooms, the spending of months in the surgical supply room, making dressings, taking long trips to the office, discharging patients and carrying cards hither and yon, cleaning of basins and instruments in the operating room, drying of gloves, etc.

Hospitals have, in the past, relied far too much upon the manual strength of the student nurse for the fulfilment of physical obligations in its equipment and structure, as well as for the care of the human element. Training schools have often been no more than the means of decreasing the operating cost of institutions for the care of the sick and have been, in many instances, exploited most grossly for an individual interest.

In our modern schools of nursing, our curricula are such that with eight hours of ward duty, a student has quite all she can endure without the additional physical fatigue of cleaning and scrubbing. Energy may be expended in many different ways, depending entirely upon the stimulus given, mental or physical, and brings forth the result coinciding with that stimulus.

¹ Read at a meeting of the alumnae of the Department of Nursing and Health, Teachers College, New York, February 22, 1919.

We are constantly stating, in and out of our professional circles, the need for intelligent care of the patient, attention to detail, comfort, and the aesthetic appearance of ward and the patient's intimate surroundings. Now how can any human being attend to the physical needs of from ten to twelve patients, carry out the physicians' orders, scrub the beds and bed-side tables, write up charts, and have the time or opportunity to be more than an ordinary automaton, geared at a very high rate of speed? Is the opportunity given to listen to the patients' point of view or to quiet any misapprehensions they may have, to be intelligently informed regarding the patient's condition other than that the body is clean and the bed tight? Now that is not nursing, from my interpretation of the words, "care of the sick."

In our classes, we teach our students the necessity of coördinating their theoretical knowledge with the work on the wards, associating symptoms with certain diseases, action of certain drugs and the cause or condition warranting their use, we ask that the student read over histories and physical examinations and bring examples of certain types of disease to the class-room for information and discussion. I wonder how many of us could measure up to the momentous task which we so casually require of the student nurse? It simply cannot be done. It is not being done and never will be done until we remove some of those routine procedures which are not necessary, after a certain point in the training of the student nurse, and which should then be turned over to a ward maid.

It is not necessary that a nurse be required to scrub ten bed-side tables and as many beds three hundred and sixty-five days in a year, clean bed-pans and count soiled linen every morning for thirty-six months or make every empty bed in the ward for an equal length of time, in order to obtain a diploma, stating she has satisfactorily completed the course of instruction in a certain school of nursing.

I firmly believe that students, in their preliminary period, should be required to carry out these household measures as part of their instruction, but to cling tenaciously to the idea that it is a necessity, is a camouflage. The real reason is the inability of the hospital to procure funds for the employment of the ward maid. The nurses have always done this work, therefore, traditionally, they always must. We are fast removing those guide posts from our line of march and in their place are erecting the word education. We must first of all convince ourselves that these procedures are unnecessary, as far as routine is concerned, and then educate our boards to the realization that they have under their roofs, a teaching institution, a school, which means that it is not a commercial adjunct, but one which requires financial support. No teaching institution is primarily a financial

enterprise, which nets cash returns. Hospitals which maintain schools of nursing, must be prepared to supply such facilities as warrant their assertion of a school.

The medical profession, and the public as well, are calling for the scientifically trained nurse and if we are to turn her out upon society as a finished product at the end of three years, we shall be obliged to minimize her effort to supply the hospital with half its maid service, as a compensation for the privilege afforded her in being there.

Members of hospital boards, like all other individuals, change their ideas only by evolution, and having held a tradition regarding the services of the nurse, it is not going to be an easy task to convince them of the wisdom of allowing the student nurse to spend her time directly with the patient, that she may perhaps preserve the life of an individual, instead of striving to carry the ward maid's duties. This sounds like an incongruous statement but such situations are prevalent in our hospitals every day. We hear criticisms from the public regarding a patient's being left alone, or of little attention being given certain details in respect to the patient's comfort, when basically the difficulty lies in the inability of the nurse to keep her ward spotlessly clean and to attend to the patient, at the same time.

From a financial standpoint, it is not efficient to utilize a service, which until very recently was sold by the hospital to the private patient for \$14.00 to \$21.00 per week, to do a piece of work which at best, costs \$30.00 for a month. To say the very least, that is not good business. I am not an advocate for the exploitation of the student nurse by the institution for the care of private cases, but I sincerely believe that that service should be rendered the public, whether for the ward or the private patient, and not spent upon such inanimate objects as bed-side stands and ward rooms.

This change will only come about by continual pressure from the heads of schools of nursing and by giving those in authority a closer insight into what the demands upon the students are, by the institution and by the community, when she goes forth to render a service which bestows its greatest usefulness when administered with intelligent understanding.

There is another duty in many schools which falls to the student nurse and that is the care of her room. A certain amount of responsibility regarding the appearance of her room is justifiable, and she should be responsible for the dusting of her dressing table and writing desk, but the sweeping of the floor and making of the bed should, it would seem, be done by the maid.

We cannot, I realize, immediately put into operation a system

which would bring these changes, but we can aspire to a better condition of things, as opportunities present themselves, drive a wedge, and be prepared to strike forcibly and for a permanent result.

Our curricula are forming themselves into a well-rounded course of study for the student nurse with elimination of non-essentials; it is the practical side which needs our thought and earnest application at this time, for if students are to carry five hours of class work each week, and in many instances it is more, some means must be devised for eliminating much of the routine procedure.

Responsibility for these details must be insisted upon by the supervisors, and nurses must not be allowed to get the idea that they need not disturb themselves with these trifles; that is not the impression I wish to convey. Each nurse must at some time in her training, carry through every piece of work which in any way contributes to the comfort of the patient and so be in a position to immediately ascertain when such details are being neglected in any particular.

In order to carry out such an arrangement as I have suggested regarding ward maids, this personnel must be under the training school and not under the hospital administration, otherwise there will be poor coördination and the result more disastrous than the present organization. Only a centralized administration with direct lines of authority makes such a plan feasible.

I fully realize there are many obstacles in the way, both of a physical and psychological nature, and that changes must come slowly if they are to be permanent, for radical reforms disrupt our organization and interfere decidedly with our discipline, which is even to-day a very necessary adjunct in well established training schools. With the type of young women whom we are admitting to our schools, full of altruistic ambitions, very young in years and expression, adjustments are difficult and call for much thought and good judgment, for the spirit of the time is one of restlessness, discontent, desire for socialistic expression, and unless we move slowly and keep the reins well in hand, our schools of nursing will develop into such enterprises as the school body dictates, rather than the institutions which have been formulated to properly guide and educate the young woman for a public servant.